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ABSTRACT

This paper offers strategies for implementing student-generated games that focus on interpersonal communication skill development and suggestions for appropriate instructor and student evaluation measures. In today's classroom, games can be used to teach subject matter to adult students with the added advantage of making learning fun. (Appendixes contain a sample interpersonal communication applied lab final information sheet and a sample evaluation form; contains 8 references.) (CR)

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RUNNING HEAD: Games

ED 426 420

THE GAMES OUR STUDENTS PLAY: A REVIEW ACTIVITY FOR THE INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION CLASSROOM

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INTRODUCTION

The word "game" conjures up pleasant images from our youth: *Chutes and Ladders*, Flashlight Tag, *Twister*, Hide and Seek, even Spin the Bottle! The word "game" reminds us of carefree times experienced in years' past; of friends and childhood playfulness.

In today's classroom games can be used to teach subject matter to adult students with the added advantage of making learning as much fun as elementary school recess. Nilson claims that:

> Used at the right times for the right reasons, games can set a mood for learning, fostering in the learner a receptivity for the "lesson" about to be learned. Games can stimulate the intuitive natures of otherwise too logical and stuck-in-a-rut kinds of [students]. Games can help people feel good about themselves. Games can encourage an awareness of one another's human characteristics and illuminate the wonderful capacities that we all have for growth as we work together. (1993, p.xx)

Whereas Nilson discusses the benefits of using games to introduce subject matter, we also find the strategy useful for reviewing course content. In our interpersonal communication classes we include student-generated games as an option for our applied final project. For this option, students are asked to create an original game which focuses on interpersonal communication skill development and can be played by the entire class (preferred) or in small groups/stations. Students may work individually or in teams to develop a title, specific game rules, and all necessary game components (boards, mats, playing pieces, game cards, etc.). Prior to the last day of class, course time is devoted to playing the student games as an experiential review for the comprehensive final examination. Student and instructor assessment of the assignment has been extremely positive.

Strategies for implementing student-generated games and suggestions for appropriate instructor and student evaluation measures are addressed in the remaining sections of this paper.

IMPLEMENTATION

When introducing this project, the instructor initially must clarify the meaning of the word "game" as it applies to the classroom assignment. The *New Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (1989) defines games as "diversions, fun, a contest, a line of work, or to play for a stake." *The World Book Encyclopedia* (1963) defines games as "a way of playing, diversion, pastime; a contest played according to the rules, which one side or person tries to win; an activity or undertaking that is carried on under set rules like a game; or any activity, vocation, etc. in which there is competition". In *Games Trainers Play*, Newstrom and Scannell (1978) define a game as "an exercise, illustration, activity, or incident used to present or support the trainee's learning" and refer to the use of games as "part of the process element of the learning experience" (p. xiii). Additionally, Newstrom and Scannell describe game characteristics as: brief, inexpensive, participative, low risk, adaptable, single focused, and including props.

Students need to know which of the aforementioned definitions or other variation applies to their assignment. For example, we tell students they can interpret this assignment as an activity, with the presentation of that activity designed to demonstrate their level of understanding of the related course material. Content areas or chapters

may be assigned to specific groups to facilitate a comprehensive (as opposed to limited/repetitious) review of course material. We stress the importance of the assignment, how it is relevant to the course, and the idea that students are competing only in the sense of doing the best they can do - a competition of individual excellence.

EVALUATION - INSTRUCTOR

To encourage individual excellence, teacher expectations related to the assignment must be clearly articulated. The project and its evaluation should be described in detail around mid-term to allow students ample time to digest the assignment and to develop their game and presentation. (See Appendix A: Interpersonal Communication Applied Lab Final Information Sheet. *FYI: additional activities are included in the appendix for those students who prefer to demonstrate their competency via a different option. The majority of students, however, do opt to develop original games*). If an instructor desires creativity and specific content application in the game, then the students should be instructed accordingly and given the ratio, equation or basic estimate of how the grading will reflect those values. In fact, when making the assignment, we give students a copy of the actual project evaluation sheet and discuss the different criteria with them. (See Appendix B: Interpersonal Communication Applied Lab Final Evaluation Form).

Ultimately, the criteria for the game assignment leads to its evaluation. Is the project designed to serve as an icebreaker, to lead the class in a review, to emphasize or illustrate main points, to cover new material, or to demonstrate the students' level of content comprehension? Is it group versus individual work? How are points allocated for creativity, number of key concepts, application, organization, neatness, in-class presentation, written product? The instructor must answer all of these questions before announcing the assignment in class. Please note that knowledge of topic/understanding of concepts is addressed in the project, the presentation, and the written report thus indicating that the most important aspect of the assignment is the student's comprehension of course content and ability to demonstrate content mastery.

Presentation day is typically scheduled for the last day of class prior to the comprehensive final examination. On this day, it is easy to get caught up in the "fun of the moment." One way the instructor can enjoy the projects but still give them appropriate attention for grading is to videotape the presentations and grade them after class in order to be free during class to participate in the activities. Be advised, however, that students will attempt to stump the teacher with difficult game questions - teacher credibility may be at stake!

EVALUATION - STUDENTS

Evaluation of student game projects can be difficult. The projects are of such a creative nature that it may be difficult for the instructor to differentiate between projects that display the students' knowledge of the subject matter and projects that look very professional and are fun, but have included only a few terms/concepts learned in class. Also, because most students complete the project in small groups, the instructor may have difficulty assigning individual grades to the project. These dilemmas spawned the creation of a 2-3 page, student-authored paper which provides the opportunity for students to describe what they learned by applying class concepts and terms to the creation of their project. Additionally, the paper provides the instructor with a product by which s/he can more accurately evaluate each students' individual knowledge level.

In this paper, students are asked to address 2 specific subject areas: what they contributed to the project and what interpersonal concepts they witnessed occurring within their own group. The purpose of having students describe their contribution to

the project is two-fold: It gives the instructor better insight into each students' level of involvement in the project (thereby facilitating the assignment of appropriate rewards or penalties). It also deters serious slackers from developing within the groups, as the students know going into the project that they will have to write about their own specific contributions to the final product.

In their analyses, students typically describe how they attempted to equitably divide their project into individual tasks, and what parts of the game they made or bought. Unfortunately, some students are prone to simply reiterate their game rules and procedures (this is to be covered during the presentation, not in the paper). Therefore, it is important for the instructor to specify what is expected of students in the first segment of the paper.

As stated earlier, the second portion of the paper is devoted to describing and applying interpersonal concepts to situations that the students observed while working together on their project. This part of the assignment suggests that although the project is designed to be fun, it is, nevertheless, serious and designed to incorporate interpersonal concepts learned throughout the semester. In this section of the paper, students have the opportunity to display and apply what they learned in class, giving the instructor the advantage of evaluating each student on his or her personal knowledge of the course content. For example, former student papers have applied various models of communication; I-it, I-you, I-thou relationships (Buber, 1970); dual perspective (Phillips and Wood, 1983; Wood, 1992); the ubiquitous hierarchy according to Maslow (1968); and their own interpersonal interactions which occurred in the group.

Assigning a student reaction/analysis paper along with the game boosts the credibility and validity of this unconventional approach to a final project. Not only does the paper give the instructor a more objective measuring device for evaluating individual student work/mastery, but it also forces the students to review class material and critically observe group interaction in a manner they most likely have not done before.

CONCLUSION

Historically, New Englanders thought games were bad for people - a waste of time that could be better spent on work or in study. While some instructors, like those New Englanders of yesteryear, may scoff at the usefulness of games in the classroom setting, we have found them to be a creative outlet which enables the course content/textbook to come alive, encourages the student to make communication concepts applicable to their own lives in a variety of ways, and requires the demonstration of that applicability in front of their peers. We, as educators, find the students' enthusiasm and creativity inspiring and have found many of their ideas to be brilliant and potentially marketable. Who knows? Perhaps in our classrooms we will see the Milton Bradleys, Parker Brothers, and Hasbros of the future.

Game samples will be provided for examination.

APPENDIX A

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION APPLIED LAB FINAL INFORMATION SHEET

Students may select one of the following individual or group activities to develop during the second half of the semester. All final assignment presentations should be made during the last, regularly scheduled class meeting.

OPTIONS:

1. Create an **ORIGINAL** game which focuses on interpersonal communication skill development and can be played by the entire class, small groups, or in stations. 3 students may work together on this project. Students must develop a title, rules, and all necessary game components. Additionally, students must lead the class in playing the game for 10-15 minutes.

2. Read 2 self-help books (minimum page length for each = 100). Present a 7-9 minute report in class on:
   - How the subject matter is related to interpersonal communication, and
   - How you and your peers might implement suggestions from the book.

3. Explore 5 types of support groups available in the community. 2 students may work together on this project. Present a 7-9 minute report in class on:
   - How these organizations are related to interpersonal communication skills, and
   - What services they offer.

4. Create a thematic compendium of 10 interpersonal communication articles from contemporary magazines (e.g., articles on nonverbal communication, developing relationships, strengthening marriages, etc.). Present a 7-9 minute report in class on how the articles supported or opposed course discussion of the same concepts.

5. Create a 7-10 minute original video, semi-professional in quality, which details a particular aspect of interpersonal communication. Video is to be shown during class time. Students will be responsible for obtaining their own video equipment. A tv/vcr will be provided in class for viewing the tape. 3 students may work together on this project.

6. Create a class newspaper which covers relevant "news" related to interpersonal communication. 3 students may work together on this project. Present a 5-7 minute report to the class on the articles included.

ALL PROJECTS include a 2-3 page typed paper written by each individual which includes the following:

1. Name(s) of participant(s) & title of project
2. Appropriate writing style (spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure)
3. An introductory paragraph followed by:
   Discussion of the interpersonal communication skills & concepts covered
   Discussion of the experience. What did you learn about yourself, others, & interpersonal communication by completing this assignment? This portion of the paper should not simply repeat the previous section.

APPENDIX B

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION APPLIED LAB FINAL EVALUATION FORM

NAME:_____ Date:_____

INTERPERSONAL CONCEPTS ADDRESSED:_____

_____

TIME:_____ OPTION:_____

PRESENTATION

CONTENT: _____ (25 Points)
- *Main points (rules) clear and well-developed
- *Knowledge of and interest in topic clear
- *Course terminology used effectively
- *Students' understanding of material clearly demonstrated
- *Specific instances/examples relevant to course content provided
- *Purpose of presentation achieved
- *Creative

ORGANIZATION: _____ (25 Points)
- *Logically organized
- *Time limit adhered to

DELIVERY: _____ (25 Points)
- *Appropriate dress
- *Audience's attention maintained
- *Enthusiastic about topic
- *Sincere and professional

FINAL PAPER

FORMAT/CONTENT: _____ (25 Points)
- *Neat and organized
- *Met requirements (length, content, etc.)
- *Displayed students' understanding of interpersonal communication
- *Supported presentation effectively
- *Clear writing style

GENERAL COMMENTS

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